

Hartford Crime Down But Not Out

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Crime in Hartford is down to its lowest point in at least five years. This fact might come as a surprise to anyone bombarded by emotional news coverage of recent shootings in the city.

Though these news accounts report the real personal tragedies surrounding acts of gun violence, they distort a larger truth - all serious crime in Hartford is down by double digits from this time last year and down from each of the past four years. In fact, there are significantly fewer victims of violent crime this year than at any time since I took office.

Though few news outlets have taken note, Part 1 crime statistics reported to the FBI - including murder, rape, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, larceny and automobile theft - show that each of our neighborhoods is experiencing significantly fewer incidents of crime than were reported last year at this time.

The city has seen three more murders in the past year than the year before. Though our murder rate this year is below the five- and 10-year average, one murder is one too many. Additionally, even though the total number of victims of aggravated assault has gone down from last year, a greater percentage of victims are assaulted with firearms.

Hartford has taken a multi-pronged approach to reducing gun violence in the city. Under Police Chief Patrick Harnett's leadership, special city narcotics and firearms officers, with assistance from federal agents, are targeting illegal firearms in every neighborhood. I am working closely with the social service agencies and the Board of Education to provide jobs and programs for our most at-risk youths. I have called on the legislature to pass tougher laws to regulate the second-hand gun market that provides too many guns to criminals on the streets.

Along with Mayor John DeStefano Jr. of New Haven and Mayor John Fabrizi of Bridgeport, I have called on the governor to provide more state resources for summer jobs for youths, additional transition services for ex-offenders coming out of correctional facilities into our communities, and state police detectives to work with our undercover drug and weapons units. We need to take a comprehensive long- term approach to reducing gun violence, not just look for a politically expedient quick fix.

We have made real progress in reducing crime in Hartford - and the millions of dollars of private investment in our neighborhoods reflect that success. That being said, we are redoubling our efforts to take illegal guns and the people who use them off the street. If our churches, law enforcement agencies, political leaders, social service agencies and residents stand united to fight violence in our neighborhoods, we can significantly enhance the safety of our residents.

Eddie A. Perez is mayor of Hartford.

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